

Sinus Problems: Home Remedies and Tips -

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Are you among the 37 million Americans who have sinus problems each year? If so, there's a lot you can do around the house to create a "sinus-friendly" environment -- reducing your risk for sinus pressure.

Even better, many of the measures are simple and inexpensive.

Sinus Problems: Getting to the Triggers

First, it's crucial to figure out why you have sinus problems, says Jordan S. Josephson, MD, a Manhattan ear-nose-throat specialist and author of *Sinus Relief Now*. "Allergies are a fairly common reason for sinus problems," he says.

Allergies that affect the nose, such as hay fever and indoor allergies, can cause the nasal membranes to swell, and the passages to the sinuses -- hollow spaces within the bones around the nose -- to become blocked. Mucus, which typically drains from the sinuses to the nose, can't drain.

Other reasons? "A dry nose leads to more sinus problems," says Richard F. Lavi, MD, an allergist in Twinsburg, Ohio. "Nasal dryness leads to congestion, thickened mucus, and worsened sinusitis."

Whatever the trigger, you can pick and choose from these five tips, or adopt all of them.

Sinus Tip 1: Keep Your Cool

"When the heat is on, the membranes get dry," says Russell B. Leftwich, MD, an allergist in Nashville, Tenn. Mucus isn't cleared as effectively, boosting the risk of sinus problems.

He can't recommend a specific indoor temperature range as ideal, but offers this guide: "You are better off wearing a sweater and keeping it cooler than cranking it up so you are comfortable wearing only a T-shirt."

Let your nose guide your indoor temperature range, suggests Lavi. "If you are not waking up with nosebleeds or congestion, that is probably a good temperature range."

Sinus Tip 2: Humidify Your Air

Strive for an indoor environment that's not too dry and not too humid. "Dust mites love greater than 50% humidity," Lavi warns. And if you're allergic to dust mites, that's bad news for your sinuses.

A too-humid indoor environment can also encourage the growth of mold, which can also set off sinus problems, says Todd Kingdom, MD, professor of otolaryngology--head and neck surgery at the University of Colorado School of Medicine. Some people are more sensitive to this than others are, he says.

Experts are divided on the value of room humidifiers for creating a sinus-friendly home.

Forget them, Leftwich says. "A room humidifier never makes a difference. There is too much air to humidify."

But Josephson says using humidifiers in the bedroom beginning in October through March or April can make a difference in keeping sinus problems at bay.

Vaporizers can keep you more comfortable if you are in the midst of a sinus problem, Leftwich says. But you need to have it close by. "It doesn't do any good to have a vaporizer on the other side of the room." And, he warns, the devices must be cleaned daily to keep bacteria from growing in them.

Breathe the mist coming from vaporizers, but not the steam, he warns. Steam can easily burn you. "Most vaporizers

don't produce any steam, just a mist," Leftwich says. "But those vaporizers that do make steam and certainly steam from a tea kettle or pot on the stove must be used with caution." Steam can burn you, so don't come into contact with it.

Sinus Tip 3: Ventilate Your House

An energy-efficient house is not necessarily a sinus-friendly one, Leftwich says. "You seal up a house to make it more energy efficient, and you end up with stale air that aggravates sinus problems," he says.

The solution: "Opening up the house on a warmer day to clear the air is a good thing," he says, provided it's not a high-pollen day that will set off your allergies.

The value of having air ducts on your heating and cooling system cleaned is another area of debate among experts. Leftwich calls it a waste of time and money. Some patients told him they got sicker after cleaning the ducts, he says, probably due to aggravating airborne dust. But Josephson says if the air smells dusty or moldy, it might be worth a try. Changing your air conditioner filters on a regular basis is good, too, he adds.

Sinus Tip 4: Be Water-Wise

Drinking a lot of fluids can help keep your sinuses functioning well. "At least a quart a day" is the recommendation of Leftwich. Most of that should be plain water, he says.

"The more the better," says Josephson. He tells his patients to drink enough water every day so their urine is generally clear.

Salt water nasal rinses for your nose can help, too. You can buy a kit or mix up your own at home. The recipe: Mix about 16 ounces (1 pint) of lukewarm distilled, sterile, or previously boiled water with 1 teaspoon of salt. Some people add 1/2 teaspoon of baking soda to take the sting out of the salt. Using a bulb syringe, flush your nasal cavities to clean out mucus and debris.

Neti pots are another way to irrigate your nasal cavities, Josephson suggests. This centuries-old remedy has gained popularity recently.

The pot looks like a tea pot with an elongated spout. The devices are sold widely, for about \$10 to \$20, online and in drugstores and health food stores.

To use the pot, typically you mix about a pint of lukewarm distilled, sterile, or previously boiled water with a teaspoon of salt. Next, tilt your head over a sink at an angle of about 45 degrees. Place the pot's spout into your top nostril and gently pour the solution in.

The salt water will flow through your nasal cavity, into the other nostril, and perhaps into your throat. Blow your nose to eliminate any water, then repeat the steps on the other nostril.

Clean your neti pot regularly.

Sinus Tip 5: Avoid Household Irritants

Cigarette smoke, cleaning products, hairspray, and other materials that give off fumes can all make your sinus problems worse.

"Anything that has a strong odor of fumes can be a problem, especially if you are susceptible," Leftwich says. "Cigarette smoke is probably the No. 1 offender for sinuses." He suggests asking family members to smoke outside or, better yet, to give up the habit.

If you're sensitive to pet dander, bathe or clean your pets weekly, says Lavi. As difficult as it is for pet owners, limiting exposure to your animals at night can help.

